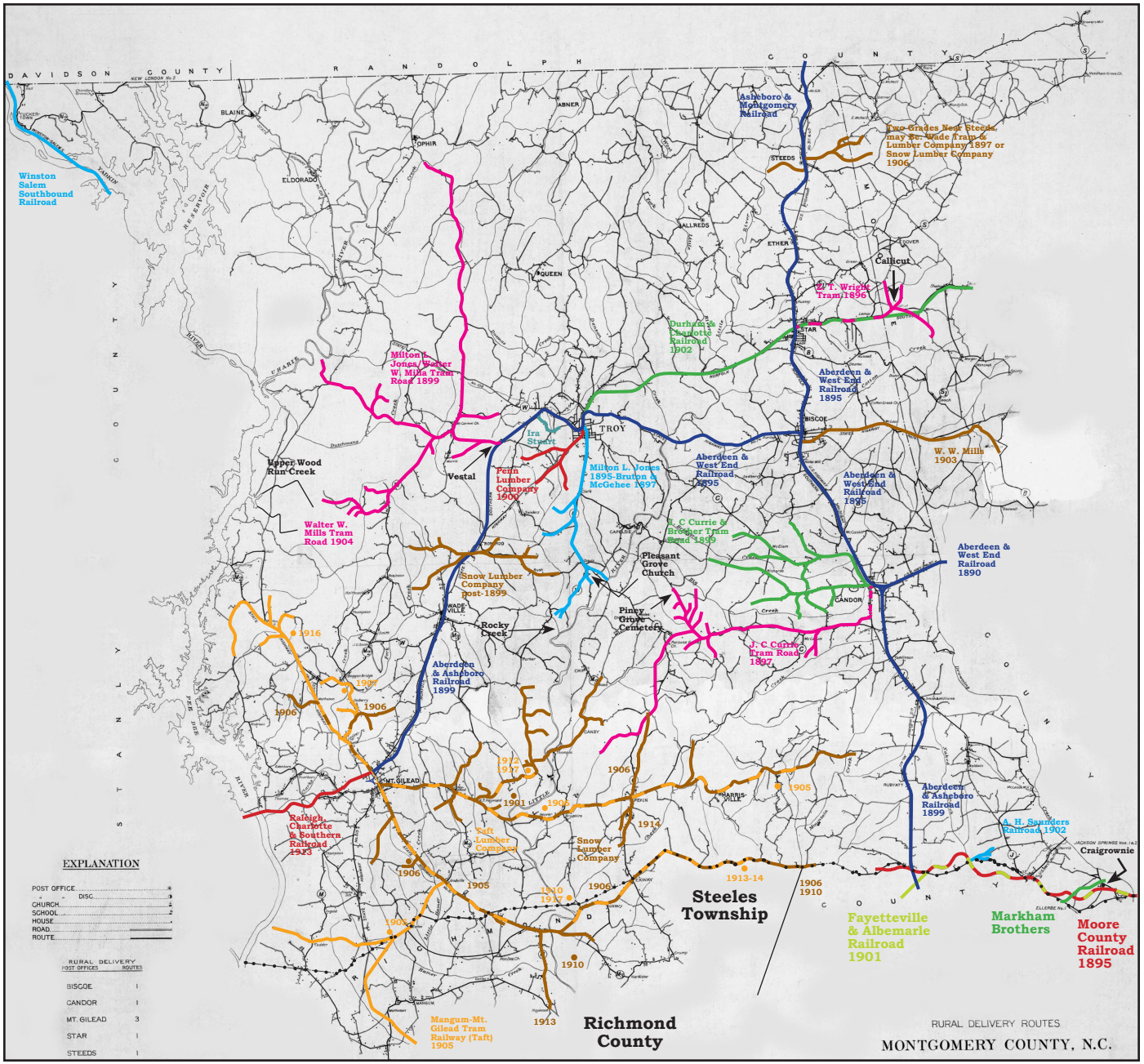
Historical Montgomery County, North Carolina Short Lines and Logging Railroads

Second Edition

James S. Hannum, MD

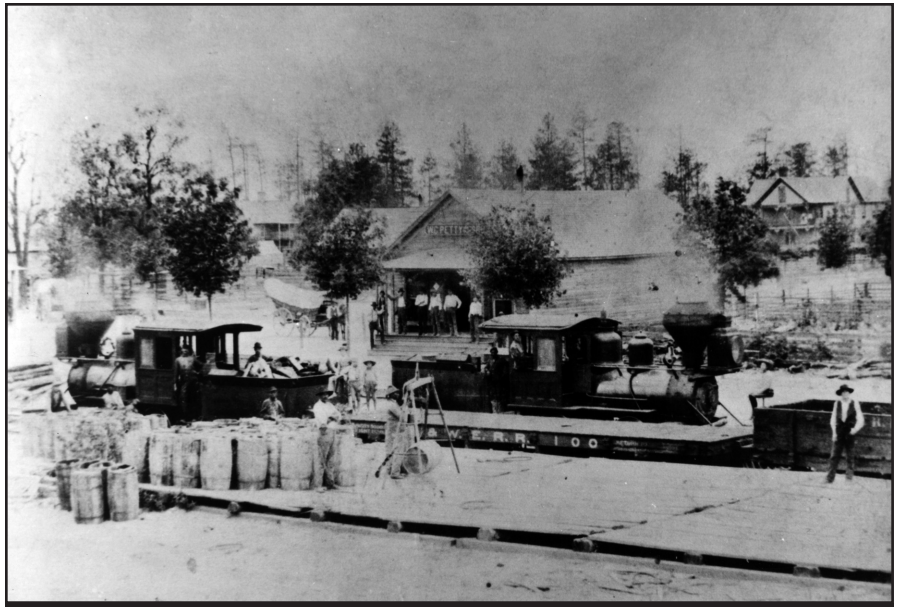
May 4, 2026



Montgomery County Railroads with Initial Construction Dates

The **Aberdeen & Asheboro Railroad** was created in 1897 by the merger of the **Aberdeen & West End Railroad** and the **Asheboro & Montgomery Railroad**, two former Page family lines which originally were involved primarily with logging. Figure 1 is courtesy of the website DigitalNC at: https://lib.digitalnc.org/record/5046?ln=en&v=uv#?xywh=-2474%2C0%2C11015%2C5703. This undated image is labelled: "Candor Depot Aberdeen and West End R. R., Old Leach Hotel building in background still standing adjacent to Harris Motel, Candor, N. C."

The 1898 edition of *Poor's Manual of Railroads* reports that the Aberdeen & Asheboro Railroad was built to standard gauge. At the time of the merger, it included a right-of-way between Biscoe and Troy which had been constructed by the Aberdeen & West End Railroad in 1895. In 1899, the Aberdeen & Asheboro Railroad constructed an extension from Troy to Mt. Gilead, resulting in a continuous line of track between Biscoe and Mt. Gilead of 22 miles.



1-Undated Photograph of Depot at Candor

Annual editions of the report of the Corporation Commission of North Carolina (which included data from railroads) continued to show "Aberdeen and Asheboro - Biscoe to Mt. Gilead (miles) .... 22.00" each year up through 1911.

The **Raleigh, Charlotte and Southern Railway** was an amalgamation of several preexisting railroads and was, itself, controlled by the **Norfolk Southern Railroad**. On January 1, 1912 the Raleigh, Charlotte and Southern Railway leased almost all of the Aberdeen & Asheboro Railroad. The western portion of the track between Biscoe and Troy was not included in the lease, for the lessee had access to Troy (from Star) via the **Durham & Charlotte Railroad**, which it had just acquired in 1911. In the 1912 report of the Corporate Commission of North Carolina, under Raleigh, Charlotte and Southern Railway Company, no track was listed between Biscoe and Troy, and the trackage between Troy and Mt. Gilead was reported as 14.00 miles.

The Raleigh, Charlotte and Southern Railway lease was recorded on pages 275 and 276 of Montgomery County Deed Book 54. Therein, four existing mainlines of the Aberdeen & Asheboro Railroad were identified: Aberdeen (in Moore County) to Asheboro (in Randolf County), 56.6 miles; Troy to Mt. Gilead (both in Montgomery County), 14 miles; Candor (in Montgomery County) and Ellerbe (in Richmond County), 17.57 miles; and West End to Jackson Springs (both in Moore County), 4 miles. Significantly, the Aberdeen & Asheboro Railroad's previously operated right-of-way between Biscoe and Troy was not mentioned as a mainline. But part of that track remained as a branch line. It was described in the lease as: "A branch line, beginning at Biscoe, in the county of Montgomery, extending thence in a southwesterly direction to a terminal three miles distant more or less."

That three-mile branch line is erroneously described on page 200 of S. David Carriker's *Railroading in the Carolina Sandhills: Volume 1*. Carriker declares that this track, originating at Biscoe, was a tram railway utilized by the Aberdeen & Asheboro Railroad. He writes that the tram travelled "southwest of their lumber yard in downtown Bisco for a distance of three miles 'to an unknown terminal'." Those quotes clearly were taken from the 1912 lease agreement referenced in the preceding paragraphs.

In fact, these three miles of track comprised the eastern end of the former Aberdeen & Asheboro Railroad line between Biscoe and Troy. The western portion of that right-of-way was abandoned when all other parts of the line were leased to the Raleigh, Charlotte and Southern Railway. Most contemporary maps after 1912 show no track whatsoever between Biscoe and Troy.

Carriker cites, as evidence for his statements, the fact that the Aberdeen & Asheboro Railroad purchased a new, 36-inch gauge Shay locomotive built in 1899. That this acquisition did take place is confirmed by the Shay Locomotive website at: <https://www.shaylocomotives.com/>. However, that source does not reveal where the engine was used. Clearly, it could not have operated on the main tracks of the Aberdeen & Asheboro Railroad, or on the branch line mentioned in the 1912 lease, for all of these were built to standard gauge. The engine likely spent time logging at some as yet undiscovered point along the Aberdeen & Asheville Railroad mainline.

John C. Currie and **James A. Currie** were sons of Angus Currie, who resided in Moore County at Carthage. John C. Currie, associated at times with his brother, carried on several businesses in Montgomery County. He was also involved in Moore County ventures at Jackson Springs and Patterson Bridge, and in the region west of Norman, in Richmond County. John C. Currie began acquiring property in Montgomery County as early as 1880. He began logging by rail on land owned by David D. Bruton, southwest of Candor, in 1897. In 1899, **J. C. Currie & Brother** constructed another set of logging lines to the west and northwest of Candor. Logs from all those areas were either exported via the Aberdeen and Asheboro Railroad or milled at Candor. Even after that timber was exhausted, John C. Currie continued to carry on a general merchandise business at Candor. His name appears there, in that capacity, in *The North Carolina Year Book and Business Directory* as late as 1916.

John C. Currie's first railroad was built to harvest timber on land belonging to David D. Bruton, which was southwest of Candor. That line is mapped on the page preceding page 1. In this region, Bruton acquired several tracts between 1891 and 1897. The relevant deeds describe these properties using metes and bounds, many of which are difficult to locate precisely in the 21st century. Nonetheless, several of these descriptors are features currently located in the region at the west end of McCallum Road.

Some of these documents are found in Deed Book 33, page 366 (1891); Book 55, page 450 (1894); Book 36, page 586 (1895); and Book 37, page 114 (March 23, 1897). Within those deeds can be found mention of land "on waters of Little Creek," "on waters of Little River," and "part of the Steele Survey near Pine Grove Church," as well as various family names such as Lewis, Blake, Parsons, and Gillis. In modern times, Lewis Mill Pond, Blake Cemetery, Gillis Branch, Piney Grove Cemetery (perhaps the modern name for Pine Grove Church's cemetery), and Bruton Mill Pond (formed by water impounded by a dam on Little River) can be found in this region.

David Dudley Bruton (also called Dudley David Bruton in some documents) bought three lots in Candor in 1896 (Montgomery County Deed Book 38, pages 149 and 151). In April 1897, he purchased an additional parcel located 50 feet east of the Candor depot (Deed Book 38, page 25).

In 1897, John C. Currie's association with David D. Bruton is revealed by a deed recorded on page 233 of Montgomery County Deed Book 42. Therein, Currie bought timber rights from Bruton and his brother-in-law, M. E. Shamberger. The transaction comprised a total of 1,395 acres (slightly more than two square miles). The document does not state the precise date when signed, but the first installment of the sale price ($2,200) was due on April 1, 1897. The property included most, if not all the property mentioned earlier which Bruton had acquired during the 1890s. Other listed parcels were on the west side of Big Creek and on the Reedy Branch of Big Creek. Significantly, Currie was allowed to construct tram roads over these properties.

Modern LiDAR ground imaging reveals terrain along McCallum Road which is compatible with an old railroad grade, presumed to have been used by John C. Currie. Near Candor, the course followed by this railroad remains undiscovered. It seems likely that it terminated on one of Bruton's lots, for Currie did not purchase any property in Candor until 1904. Similarly, the exact western extent of this Currie line is unclear; it may have extended as far as properties owned by Bruton on Little River.

John C. Currie purchased his first Shay engine in 1899. It carried Shop #491 and had been built during 1895. Shay Locomotive Company records indicate that the engine, operated as #3, was registered to the Curries at Candor. In 1902, it was used at Candor by A. H. Saunders & Company, but J. C. Currie & Brother re-acquired it for their Candor operation in 1907. The Currie brothers bought two more Shays (Shop #458 and #477) about 1900. Two of the engines (#s 458 and 491) were sold off about 1913, while #477 was scrapped at an undisclosed time. All were 36-inch gauge locomotives.

About 1900, John C. Currie formed a partnership with his brother, James A. Currie. The business was known as J. C. Currie and Brother. The partners built additional logging lines to the west and northwest of Candor. A contemporary map of those railroads could not be located by the author. Their rights-of-way, which appear on the page preceding page 1, were drawn after considering a certain amount of imprecise information. First, the existence of the modern-day named "Currie Road" suggests that the road might have been built originally by the Curries, perhaps as a logging railroad to access their timberland. Currie Road leads west from Candor between Big Creek and Ridges Creek (now called Bridgers Creek); both creeks are named in deeds to various properties acquired by the Curries. Other Currie deeds mention Grassy Fork (Branch), Reedy Branch of Cedar Creek, property owned by A. B. McCaskill (who is, perhaps, memorialized by modern-day McCaskill Road), and Macedonia Church (Deed Book 51, page 130, dated 1902).

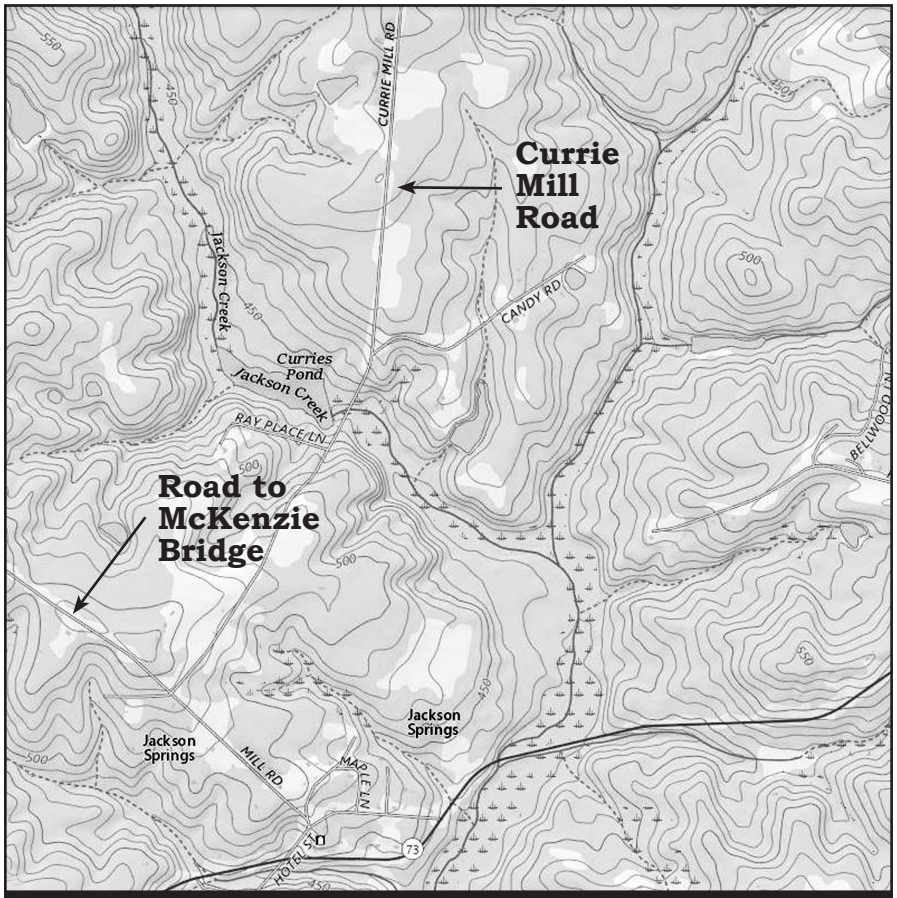
A second source, *Railroading in the Carolina Sandhills: Volume 2*, page 59, reports that "Currie's tramway is remembered by many of the local residents as running near Blake's Store from Candor to Troy."

John C. Currie resided in Hollingsworth (now Biscoe) Township when the 1900 Federal census was taken. In that record, he described himself as a merchant and farmer. The 1903 edition of *The North Carolina Year Book and Business Directory* includes no entry at Candor for any Currie business. But in 1904, John C. Currie bought two adjoining Candor lots (Montgomery County Deed Book 45, page 4 and Deed Book 48, page 107).

Shortly thereafter, the 1904-5 edition of *Polk's Lumber Directory of the United States* included "J. C. Currie & Bro" in its Candor listing. This implies that by then, the Curries possessed a sawmill at Candor. That mill probably was moved there from Patterson Bridge, for the 1903 and 1904 editions of *The North Carolina Year Book and Business Directory* showed a "Currie Lumber Company" sawmill located there. Patterson Bridge was

situated on Drowning Creek, along the border between Montgomery and Moore Counties. The Currie Lumber Company mill no longer appeared there in the 1905 edition of the directory.

In Moore County, several deeds signed between 1890 and 1892 suggest that John C. Currie was logging in the vicinity of Jackson Springs and in the region immediately to the south (two examples are found in Moore County Deed Book 3, page 220; and Deed Book 17, page 312). In 1898, Currie purchased an additional 790 acres north of Jackson Springs. Rays Corner and Patterson Branch were mentioned in that deed, which was recorded on page 253 of Moore County Deed Book 18. His last timberland acquisitions in that area were in 1900 (Book 21, page 549; and Book 22, page 142). Figure 2 is a modern map of the area around Jackson Springs. Note Curries Pond on Jackson Creek, and Currie Mill Road. The presence of Currie Mill Road suggests that Currie had a sawmill in this area, but a specific record of such a facility has not been found.



2-Topographical Map Around Jackson Springs

John C. Currie did operate another sawmill at Patterson Bridge, not far from Jackson Springs. Patterson Bridge, on Drowning Creek, is located now on the eastern border of Montgomery County. But until 1898, it was in Moore County. The Currie mill was situated on the **Moore County Railroad**, which was abandoned about 1903. That mill appeared for the last time in the 1904 edition of *The North Carolina Year Book and Business Directory*, and it was moved to Candor shortly thereafter.

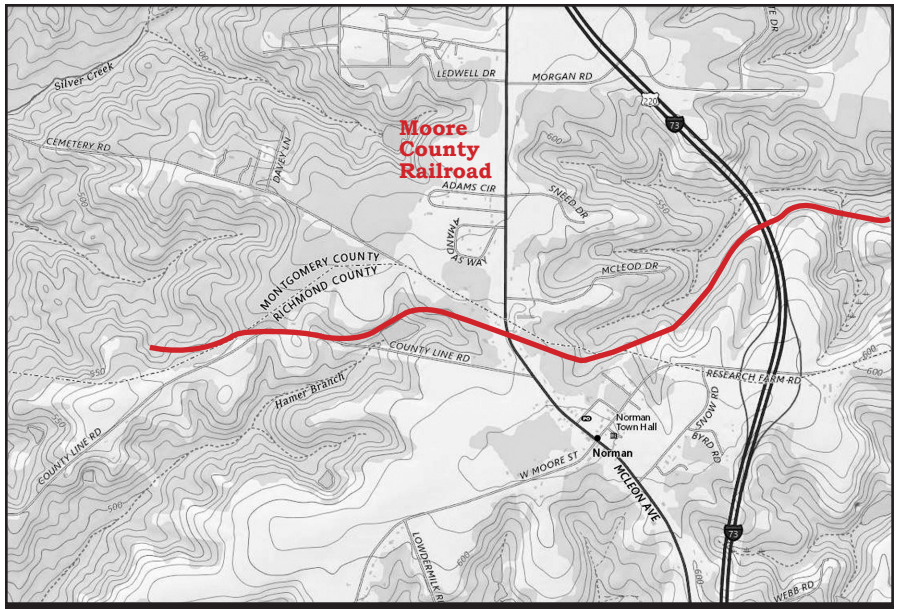
3-1901 Map Showing the Moore County & Western RR

Somewhat west of Patterson Bridge, the Moore County Railroad terminated at Craigrownie, a place which no longer exists as a named community. However, Figure 3, part of Tunison's 1901 *Map of North Carolina*, shows a projected extension of the Moore County Railroad. It was called the **Moore County & Western Railroad** and was proposed to travel farther west, through Sprauls, and on to Dry Creek. LiDAR ground imaging suggests that this extension was graded, but no record could be found to suggest that the extension was operated by either the Moore County Railroad or the Moore County & Western Railroad. However, the Currie brothers may have utilized it a few years later, after 1906.

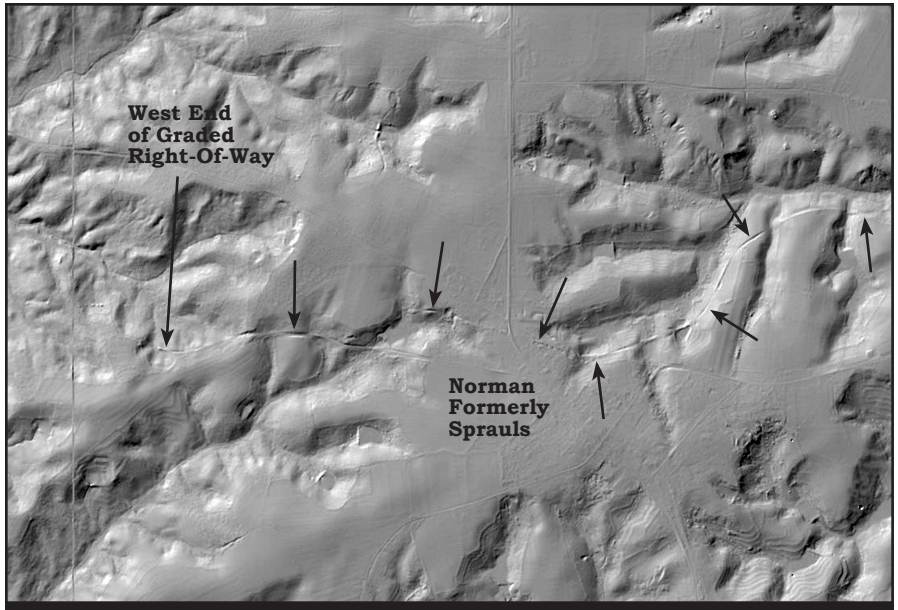
Sprauls was in Montgomery County in 1901. But in 1911, the post office there was renamed Norman. Uncertainty about the boundary between Montgomery and Richmond Counties was eventually resolved. Thereafter, Norman was securely in Richmond County. Figure 4 is a topographical map of the region around Norman. Figure 5 is a modern-day LiDAR ground image of the same place. Comparing these two images, it appears that the projected extension of the Moore County Railroad was graded for a short distance west of Norman (the former Sprauls).

John C. Currie's purchase of certain properties in 1906 suggests that shortly thereafter, he was logging in the region of McKenzie Bridge in Montgomery County and in the area northwest of Norman, in Richmond County (Montgomery County Deed Book 51, page 443). He acquired three separate tracts from the heirs of A. H. Saunders, the Montgomery County logger who had acquired one of Currie's Shay locomotives (Shop #491) in 1902. The first parcel was in Rocky Springs Township of Montgomery County. Morganton Road, McKenzie Bridge, and Drowning Creek were mentioned as bounds.

The other two properties were in Richmond County and both used "county line road" (immediately west of Norman) as a boundary. The third parcel was additionally described



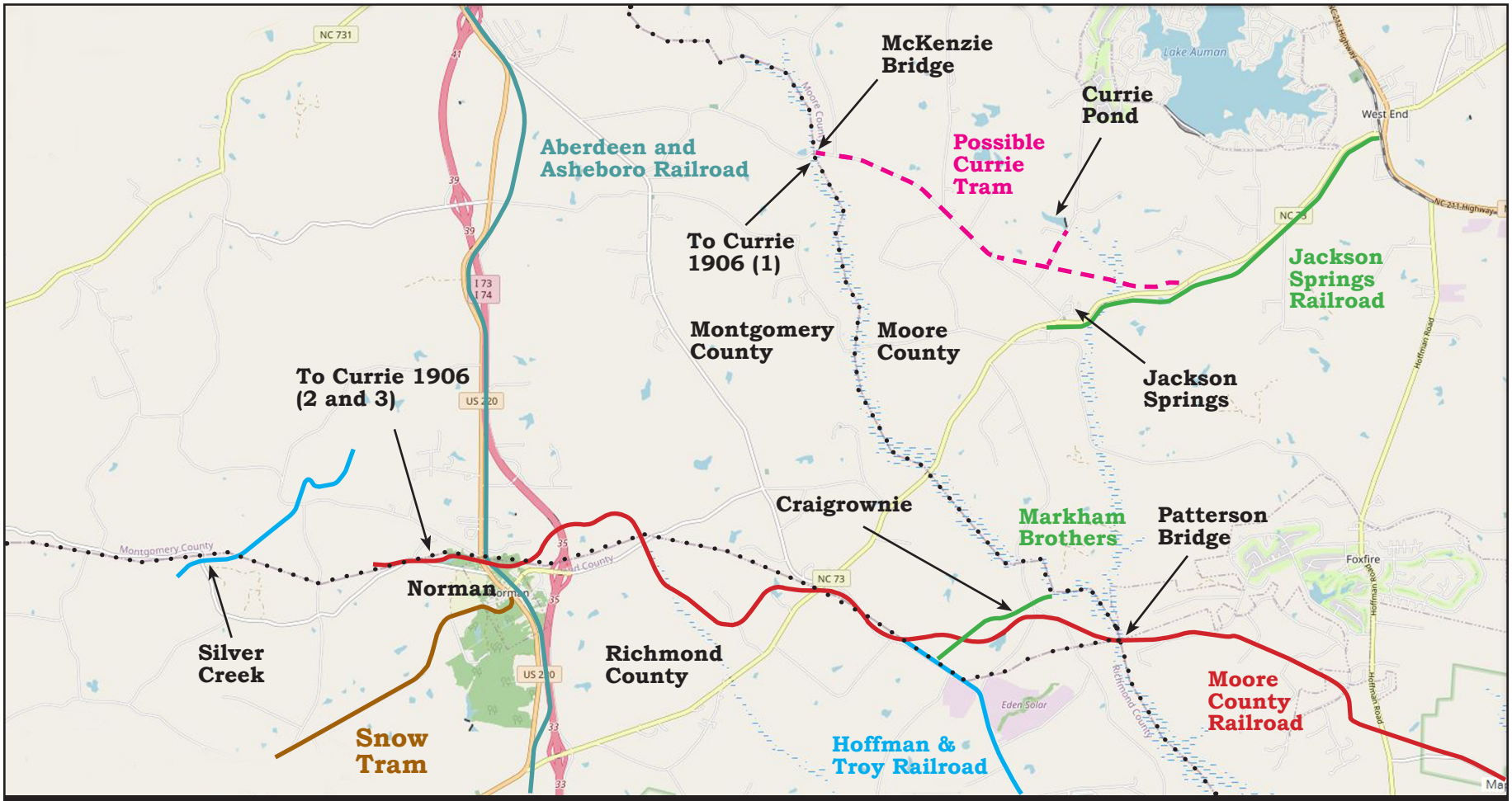
4-Topographical Map of the Region Around Norman



5-Modern LiDAR Image of the Region Around Norman

as being in Mineral Creek Township of Richmond County. Other bounds mentioned therein were "Rockingham Road," "Rooty Branch," and "to the R. R. thence with the R. R." (the Aberdeen & Asheboro Railroad's branch line between Candor and Ellerbe, which went into operation in 1899). Those bounds suggest that the last two properties were immediately northwest of Norman. Approximate locations of all three tracts are visible in Figure 6.

In that same general area, on Silver Creek in Rocky Springs Township of Montgomery County, James A. Currie had purchased land in 1899 (Montgomery County Deed Book 51, page 252). The 1899 purchase and two of the three made in 1906 by John C. Currie were near the west end of the right-of-way graded previously for the Moore County Railroad extension. The Currie brothers could easily have appropriated that pre-existing right-



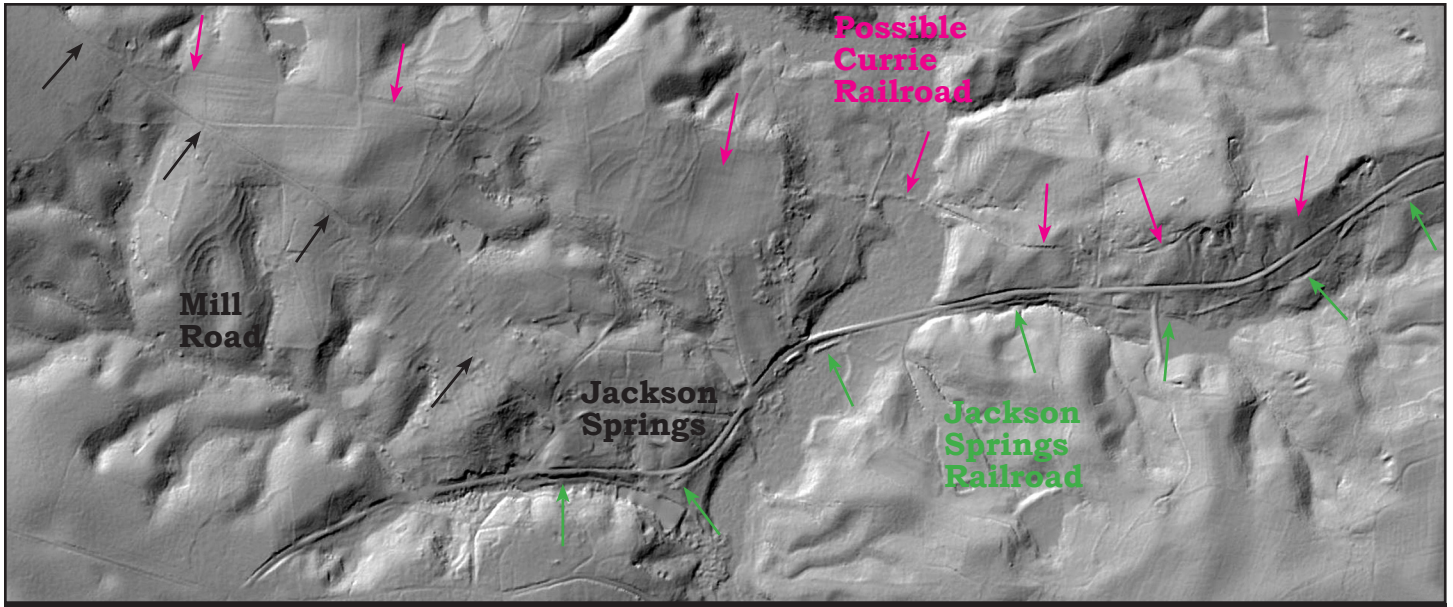
6-Various Railroads, Properties, and Landmarks Around Norman

of-way to harvest timber from those tracts (the Moore County Railroad had been abandoned about 1903, for that was the last year it was included in the *North Carolina Business Directory*). Such a right-of-way could have been used to transport logs to the Aberdeen and Asheboro Railroad at Sprauls (later called Norman) from the properties northwest of town.

Figure 6 displays many of the features discussed in the past seven paragraphs on a modern topographical map of the border between Montgomery, Moore, and Richmond Counties. The general area of James A. Currie's 1899 purchase and the three properties bought by John C. Currie's 1906 are visible. Their relationship with the abandoned Moore County Railroad can be seen.

It is speculated that John C. Currie used a tram railway to transport timber from his 1906 purchase of timberland near McKenzie Bridge. It would have terminated on the **Jackson Springs Railroad** east of the community of Jackson Springs, in Moore County. However, no document specifically confirming that notion was discovered by the author. Figure 7 is a modern LiDAR ground image of the Jackson Springs region. A feature compatible with an old railroad grade leaves Mill Road in the west, passing north of Jackson Springs to terminate on the Jackson Springs Railroad in the east. It may represent such a Currie right-of-way. Later twentieth century maps suggest that part of this grade became the west end of the county road between West End and Jackson Springs, before Highway 73 was constructed. Figure 8 is a 1939 aerial photograph of the Jackson Springs area.

Milton L. Jones was involved with at least two railroad logging operations in Montgomery County. The first one is known primarily through information contained in *Railroading in the Carolina Sandhills*, for Jones recorded no Montgomery County property or right-of-way deeds



7-Modern LiDAR Image Around Jackson Springs

8-1939 Aerial Photograph at Jackson Springs

related to that enterprise. The author, S. David Carriker, writes (*Volume 1*, page 192): "Located in Montgomery County in 1895, this operation started three miles south of Troy at Fox Mill and extended down the west side of Pekin Road to Troy itself. It operated until 9/16/1897 when Jones sold it to BRUTON & MCGEHEE for $1600. Jones operated Shay [Shop] #289 on the tramway which had a landing near the ABERDEEN & WEST END RR in Troy. . . . The present location of Fox Mill is near Pleasant Grove Church on SR #1005. The entire outfit and mill along with the equipment was sold to BRUTON & MCGEHEE in 1897." The sources cited for these statements were Montgomery County deed and chattel mortgage records. However, the grantee and grantor indexes of Montgomery County deeds contain no such documents. Carriker must have found some of this data in chattel mortgage records, which currently are unavailable to this author.

The new owners of the Jones sawmill at Fox Mill and its associated tram railway were John C. Bruton and Charles Atlas McGehee. On the 1900 Federal census of the town of Troy, Bruton appears as a merchant residing on North Main Street. That year, Charles Atlas McGehee and his brother, Miles E. McGehee, also lived in Troy. They were siblings of Susan A. (nee McGehee) Jones, the wife of Milton L. Jones. Charles and Miles each reported their occupation as sawmill superintendent. The entry for Charles noted that he was a sawmill owner.

The exact location of the Troy sawmill owned by Charles A. McGehee's has not been determined. There, McGehee did buy two adjacent town lots. The first, purchased in 1898, was recorded on page 210 of Deed Book 37. The second lot was acquired on November 13, 1900 and recorded on page 496 of Deed Book 41. It was said to be next-door to McGehee's home lot. Each property cost $50. But the two properties were sold on November 14, 1900 to William A. McMillan for $500, suggesting that possibly the sawmill had been erected on the second parcel.

Adding to the uncertainty surrounding the ownership of mills at Troy is the fact that in 1898, Milton L. Jones still owned a sawmill there (he had sold his mill at Fox Mill to Bruton & McGehee in 1897). It is mentioned as existing in the town of Troy, on the west side of the Aberdeen and West End Railroad, in a document recorded on page 468 of Montgomery County Deed Book 38. It may have been moved to Vestal about 1898-99, where Jones was developing another logging operation at about that time. That business is described later in this article.

Neither of the McGehee brothers appear a grantee of timber rights or timberland in the deed indexes of Montgomery County. But Bruton already owned a property on Rocky Creek, in Mt. Gilead Township, which he had acquired in 1895 (Montgomery County Deed Book 36, page 183). That parcel was near the south end of the tram purchased from Milton L. Jones.

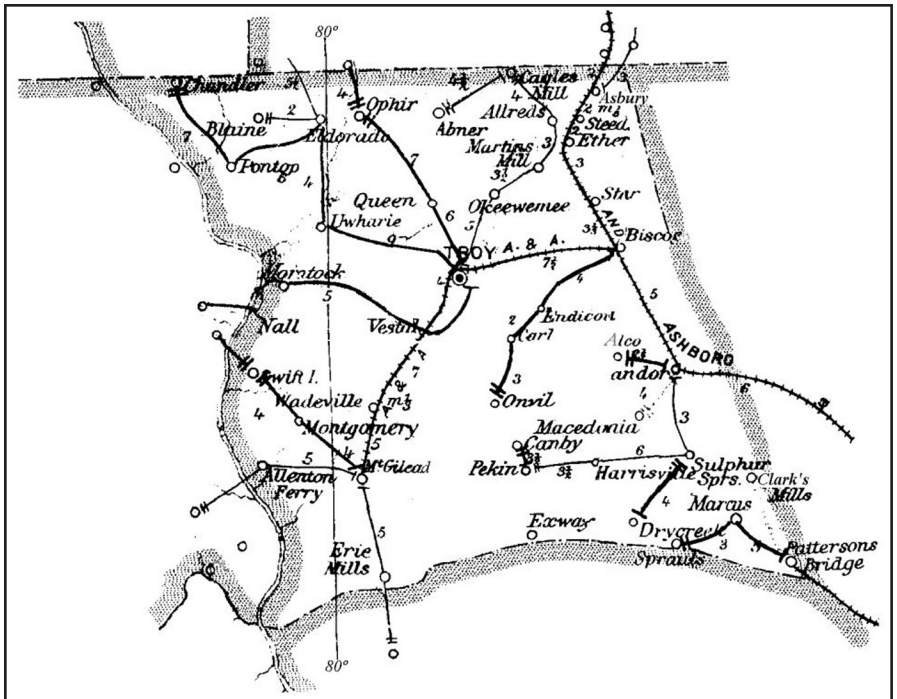
The Shay locomotive website at <https://www.shaylocomotives.com/data/searchdataframe.htmIn> confirms that, in September 1897, **Bruton & McGehee** acquired the used, 36-inch gauge Shay locomotive (Shop #289) that Milton L. Jones had previously operated on his Troy tram. For a reason not known to the author, the address recorded for the transaction was at Candor, rather than Troy. Jones must have retained some degree of ownership in the engine, for it was also included in assets transferred by Jones to W. W. Mills in 1899. At that time, it was operating on another Jones tram railway that terminated at Vestal.

On page 195 of *Railroading in the Carolina Sandhills, Volume 1*, describing Jones' Troy tramway after Bruton & McGehee acquired it, Carriker states that the "tram was extended into the Little River/Thickety Creek area until 1904." He cited Montgomery County timber deeds and chattel mortgage records as sources.

In the 1910 Federal census, Charles McGehee resided in Davidson County, where his occupation was that of railroad engineer. Jon C. Bruton lived in Fayetteville, North Carolina and manufactured cross arms.

Milton L. Jones was associated with another Montgomery County business called The Troy Manufacturing Company. That venture was incorporated by an act of the North Carolina General Assembly on February 28, 1899. The "Corporators" were Milton L. Jones, Arthur Jones, and J. Peece Blair. The company was authorized to construct and operate a tram railway "from any point on the Aberdeen and Asheboro Railroad and the Yadkin Railroad, in the counties of Montgomery and Stanley, . . ."

The resulting railway originated at Vestal, a community which no longer exists as a populated place in Montgomery County. Figure 9 comes from the North Carolina Postal History Society at: https://www.ncpostalhistory.com/. In 1905, the Vestal post office was renamed Carmel.



9-Location of Vestal, North Carolina

Less than a year after The Troy Manufacturing Company was incorporated, Milton L. Jones sold off his interest in that organization. He signed a contract with Walter W. Mills such that Mills acquired most of Jones' interest in the logging and rail-related assets of The Troy Manufacturing Company. The transaction was recorded on December 22, 1899 on page 296 of Montgomery County Deed Book 39. That document does not explain what became of the portion of the company possessed by Arthur Jones and J. Peece Blair.

The 1899 contract provides a great deal of information about that logging operation. Therein, Jones sold a 40-acre property containing a sawmill and many other items of private property. The mill was located "in Troy Township, about three & half miles west from Troy on the Aberdeen & Asheboro Railroad." The location described in that statement is vague. That might be so because the Aberdeen & Asheboro Railroad line from Troy to Mt. Gilead was constructed in 1899, at about that same time that the contract was signed. The modern-day location of the sawmill is at approximately the junction of Vestal Road and the currently existing railroad.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Milton L. Jones moved to Hendersonville, in Davidson County, where in 1909 he became president of the Piedmont Railway.

Walter W. Mills and his brother, Wayland A. Mills, were both lumbermen. Prior to the acquisition of the tram railway at Vestal, they were logging in Moore County, operating a sawmill at Carthage. According to *Railroading in the Carolina Sandhills Volume 1* (page 198), in 1895 the brothers also constructed a tram railroad terminating at Eagle Springs, on the Aberdeen and West End Railroad.

Walter W. Mills of Moore County was the new owner of the tram railway at Vestal. Since the purchase price was just one dollar, Mills must already have had some stake in the business. However, that interest was not addressed in the contract with Jones. That transaction included the right to harvest approximately 2,500 acres of timber, with 1,289 of those acres obtained from John Blue. W. W. Mills was granted the right to use the tram railroad, which linked the mill to the timberland obtained from John Blue, as well as one thirteen-ton, 36-inch gauge Shay locomotive (Shop #289), and eight tram cars.

In addition, the sale included fourteen mules "together with all the log and road wagons and harness now owned by said M. L. Jones and used in his lumber business." Although the mules and log wagons probably were used in the logging process, the wagons might have been utilized to haul finished lumber over county roads to Troy before the Aberdeen and Asheboro Railroad was operational at Vestal. In February 1899, Walter W. Mills purchased a new Shay Engine (Shop #579, named *Wayland A. Mills*, Walter's brother) for use at Vestal. It probably was used on steeper grades.

On page 198 of *Railroading in the Carolina Sandhills, Volume 1*, S. David Carriker declares that this tram railway "extended 5 ½ miles through Uwharrie, Ophir, and Troy Townships along the present SR #1139 and #1134." The source of this statement is said to be Montgomery County deed and chattel mortgage records. However, no such right-of-way data could be found in a review of deed records, and chattel mortgage records were unavailable to the current author.

On the other hand, LiDAR imaging of a different, nearby region reveals features compatible with an old railroad grade. It can be traced from a point on Highway 1134, immediately west of the crossing of Rocky Creek, toward the northwest. Near Yates Place Campground, the grade joins Dusty Level Road and follows that county road farther west.

On February 8, 1901, an act of the North Carolina General Assembly amended the name of The Troy Manufacturing Company. It became The Montgomery Railroad Company. The names of the Corporators were changed to Walter W. Mills, W. O. Mills, and W. A. Mills. In 1903, Walter W. Mills took delivery of a new Shay locomotive (Shop #810) for The Montgomery Railroad. Operated as #4, it was named *John Walker*.

Shay records indicate that Engine #4 was purchased through a dealer, the Biscoe Foundry & Machine Company and was delivered to Wadeville. This suggests the possibility that by then, the Mills brothers might have had another logging operation at that community. However, no deed, with Mills as grantee, could be located for property in that region. That being said, one deed for two acres, bought by Walter W. Mills, was recorded in 1902. It is found on page 232 of Deed Book 41. But that property could not be precisely located.

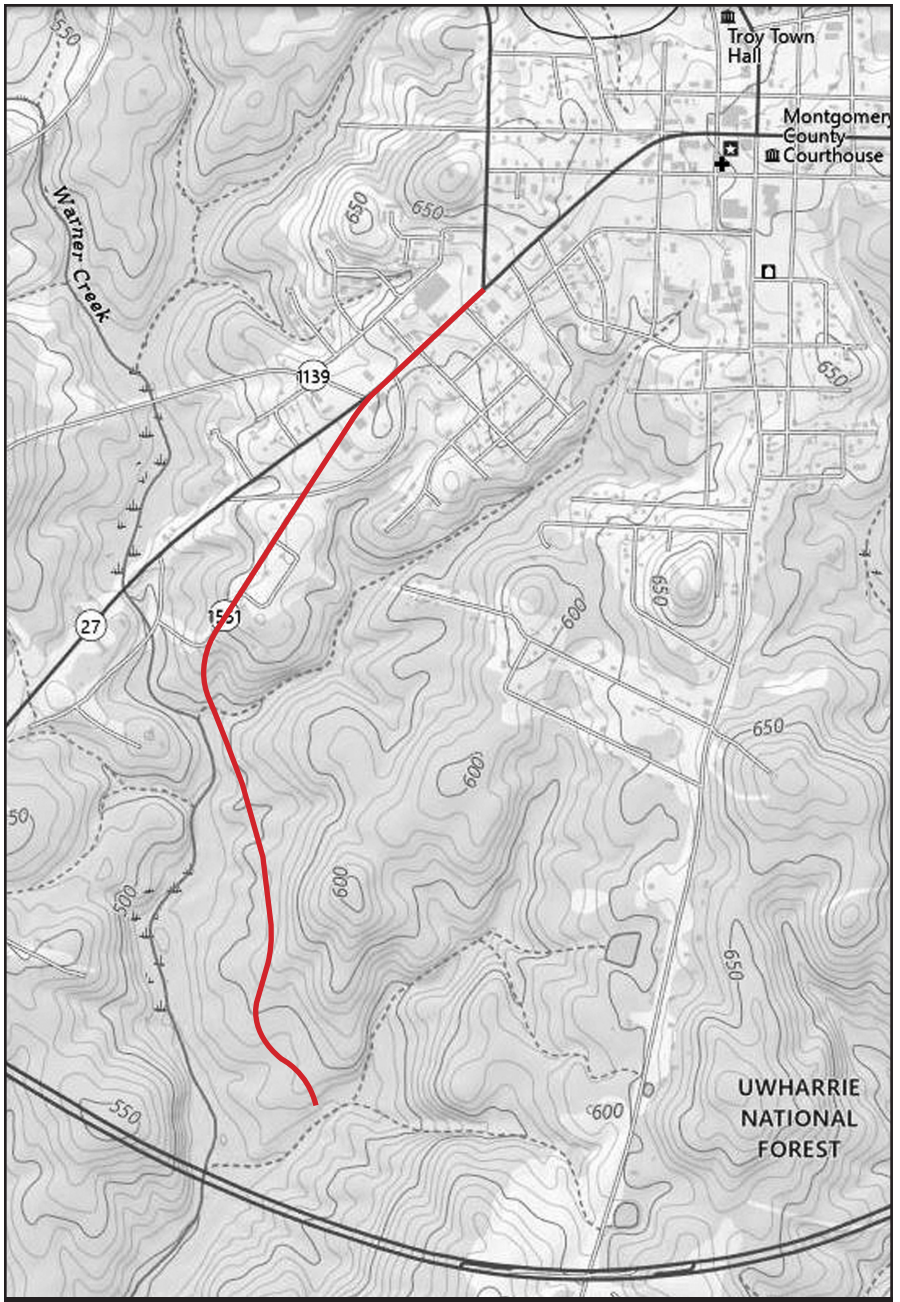
Railroading in the Carolina Sandhills describes one additional Montgomery County tram railway operated by Walter W. Mills. On page 64 of *Volume 2*, Carriker

writes: “Found in Montgomery County in Biscoe on 08/16/1903, this operation was located between Bruton St. and Factory St. and between SR #1501 and Hicks St. The tramway extended east out of Biscoe and probably crossed into Moore County along NC #24/27.” Unfortunately, Carriker provides no source citation for this statement.

Since Walter W. Mills owned half of the Biscoe Lumber Company and was the company’s president, it seems likely that this tram transported that company’s logs. No deeds with either the Biscoe Lumber Company or Mills, as grantee, could be found for property east of Biscoe in either Montgomery or Moore Counties. A definite old grade could not be discerned with LiDAR imagery.

On June 10, 1904 Walter W. Mills acquired timber rights on a large number of properties in Uwharrie Township, southwest of his existing tram railway at Vestal. Recorded on page 366 of Deed Book 44, one parcel was described as “on the waters of Wood Run Creek.” Mills was permitted to operate a sawmill on the property and had until June 1, 1907 to complete the removal of timber. This was probably the last logging done with the tram railway at Vestal.

The sawmill described in the preceding paragraph was likely moved there from Vestal. In August 1904, the 40-acre parcel at Vestal, where the mill had been, was sold by Walter W. and W. A. Mills to J. W. Lemmons (Deed Book 44, pages 411 and 425). It is unknown just when the tram railway at Vestal was pulled up. The 1904-5 edition of *Polk’s Lumber Directory* has no entry for any of the Mills brothers in Montgomery County. However, in Wake County, The W. W. Mills Company appears in the listing for Raleigh. There, in 1904, Walter W. Mills was president of the Raleigh & Cape Fear Railroad and the Carolina Trust Company of Raleigh.



10-Penn Lumber Company Right-Of-Way

The **Penn Lumber Company**, with its headquarters and mill at Aberdeen, in Moore County, acquired a used 36-inch gauge Shay locomotive (Shop #541) in 1900 for a logging operation based at Troy.

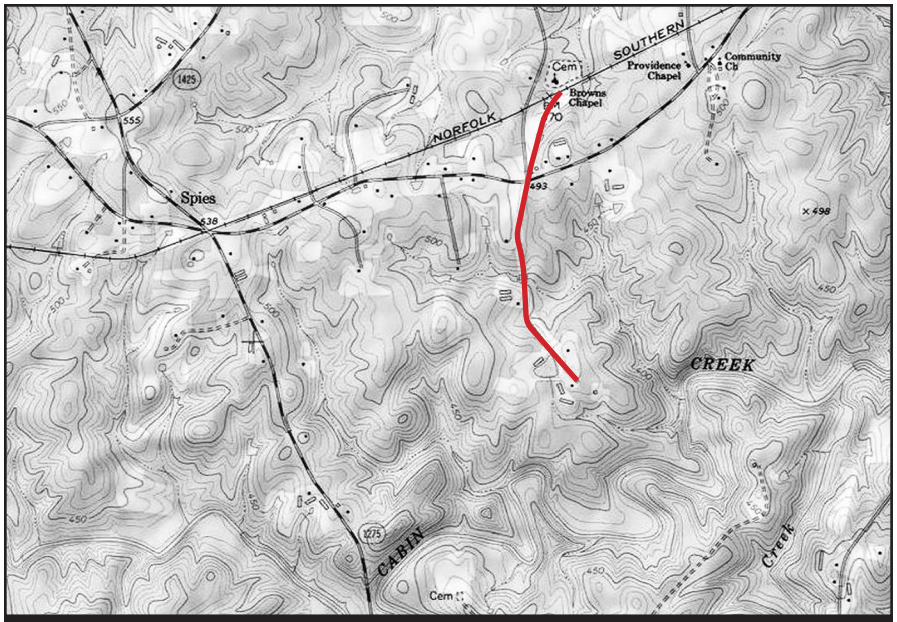
Through a deed signed in February 1900 (Moore County Deed Book 39, page 406) the Penn Lumber Company bought a 157.5-acre tract of Montgomery County timberland. Bounds mentioned in that document include "Short Fork Creek," "Sand Bar Branch," "Troy and Mt. Gilead Road," and "F. M. Warner's Corner." Neither Short Fork Creek nor Sand Bar Branch could be located on modern maps of the area southwest Troy, where the "Troy and Mt. Gilead Road" was located. It seems plausible that this property was in the modern-day area of Warner Creek or one of its branches. The right-of-way proposed on the map on the page preceding page 1 meets these criteria. Figure 10 is a topographical map of that area; the author added a possible route for the Penn Lumber Company grade.

A. H. Saunders was associated with the logging industry in Montgomery County around the turn of the twentieth century. There is plausible evidence to suggest that his name was Aaron H. Saunders and that his wife was Rebecca, who often appeared in various documents as Betty. This man's last name is also found as Sanders in some documents from the early twentieth century. The Shay locomotive website names him as Albert H. Saunders in descriptions of the locomotives produced as Shop #344 and #541, and A. H. Sanders for Shop #491. The website *Carolana* declares that in 1897, Albert H. Saunders was the mortgagee for a tram railroad operated by Z. T. Wright, a transaction which will be described later in this article. The *Carolana* web manager may have taken the "Albert H." version of the name from the Shay website.

Somewhat later, in 1901, A. H. Saunders bought a 50-acre tract of timberland on Naked Creek. Located in the southern part of Montgomery County, Naked Creek flows from north to south before crossing into Richmond County (Montgomery County Deed Book 41, page 530). Saunders took delivery of a 36-inch gauge Shay locomotive (Shop #491) at Candor in 1902. Just where it was to be used could not be determined from the records available at the Shay locomotive website. However, it might have operated near, or even over the right-of-way constructed originally by the Moore County Railroad. That line was located immediately north of the border between Montgomery and Richmond Counties and last appeared in the 1903 edition of *North Carolina Business Directory*. In 1902, that track might have technically been named the Moore County & Western Railroad. At about the same time, the Fayetteville & Albemarle Railroad aspired to reuse that same right-of-way as an electric railway.

Also in 1902, Saunders purchased a 240-acre timber tract in Moore County (Moore County Deed Book 28, page 326). That parcel was located on the west side of Cabin Creek, between Hemp (now called Robbins) and the Montgomery County line. If Shay #491 (purchased in 1902) was used there, Saunders' operation probably connected with the nearby Durham & Charlotte Railroad, which was also constructed in 1902. In the 1911 map *Rural Delivery Routes Moore County, N. C.*, a village named Sanders is located on Cabin Creek, south of the south end of Browns Chapel Road. This may have been the area where Saunders purchased this 240-acre tract. Figure 11 shows a possible route for this Saunders operation.

Finally, in 1903, Saunders purchased two nearby properties along the northern border of Richmond



11-Possible A.H. Saunders Railroad in Moore County

County. The County Line Road formed one bound of each parcel. *Railroading in the Carolina Sandhills: Volume 2* reports (page 64) that this timberland was located north of NC #73 and west of SR #1003. One parcel was a 233-acre tract memorialized in Richmond County Deed Book YYY, page 88. The other comprised 740 acres and was recorded in Richmond County Deed Book SSS, page 550. That deed reveals another significant bound: " to RR thence with RR . . ." Although the name of "the RR" is not given, it is surmised that it was the Aberdeen and Asheboro Railroad's branch line between Candor and Ellerbe, which was completed in 1899.

Saunders died in 1905 and his widow, Rebecca (Betty) Saunders, administered his estate in 1906. It included these two Richmond County properties purchased in 1903. Both were purchased by John C. Currie, whose logging activity has been described previously.

The **Snow Lumber Company** was headquartered at High Point, in Guilford County. Over many years, it harvested timber at numerous locations across Montgomery County. Tram railroads were used at several of them. The main line of the longest one, which used steel rails, travelled east from Mount Gilead along Highway 731. Use of that line, and two others, appears to have been shared with the Taft Lumber Company, although a record of such an agreement has not been discovered. Those other shared rights-of-way ran along Highway 73, and to the northwest of Mount Gilead. Also in Richmond County, commencing about 1910, the Snow Lumber Company developed a separate, extensive tram railway leading from Norman to the southwest.

Late in 1897, the Snow Lumber Company purchased a 1.875-acre parcel in the town of Steeds, North Carolina from Joseph W. Steeds (Montgomery County Deed Book 38, page 14). The website *1880-1890 Snow Lumber Company*, at: <https://nebula.wsimg.com/41ad57155117a5d4076ac34e793ba9f1?AccessKeyId=E5AFEC42C92597F17C07&disposition=0&alloworigin=1> reports: "Soon, a sawmill and dressing facility were built at Steeds, North Carolina to supply by rail all of the lumber the expanding business needed."

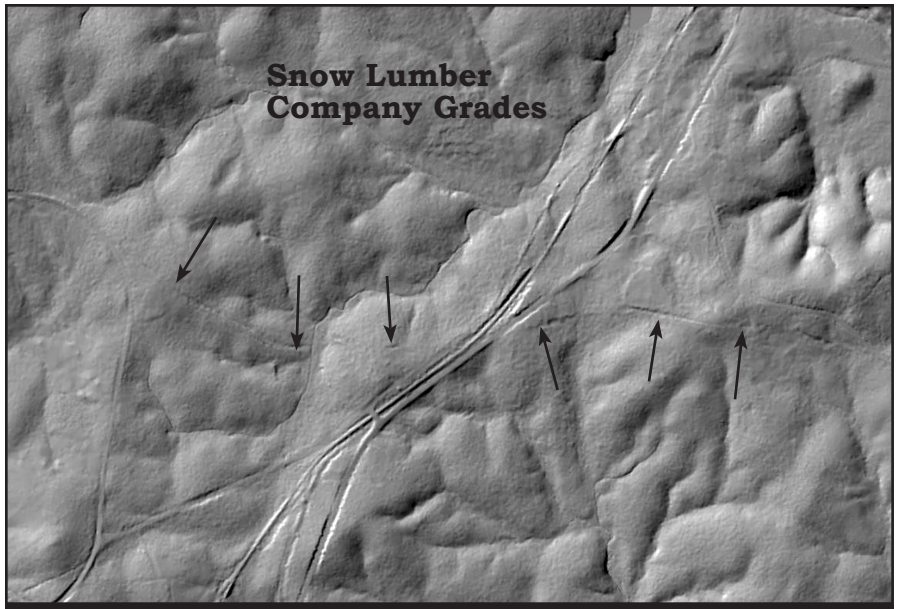
In 1906, the Snow Lumber Company took delivery of a Shay locomotive (Shop #409) at Steeds, but the place where the engine was used has not been discovered. The company did acquire timber rights in Little River Township in 1901 and 1902 (Deed Book 40, pages 455 and 510 and Book 42, page 94) but those timber deeds do not mention the use of tram roads or railroads. Deed records provide no definitive indication that the Snow Lumber Company used a railroad at Steeds. Two possible old grades can be identified near Steeds in aerial photographs from the early 1950s. The author could not determine if either

had been constructed by the Snow Lumber Company, or by the Wade Tram & Lumber Company, which had an earlier operation at Steeds in 1897.

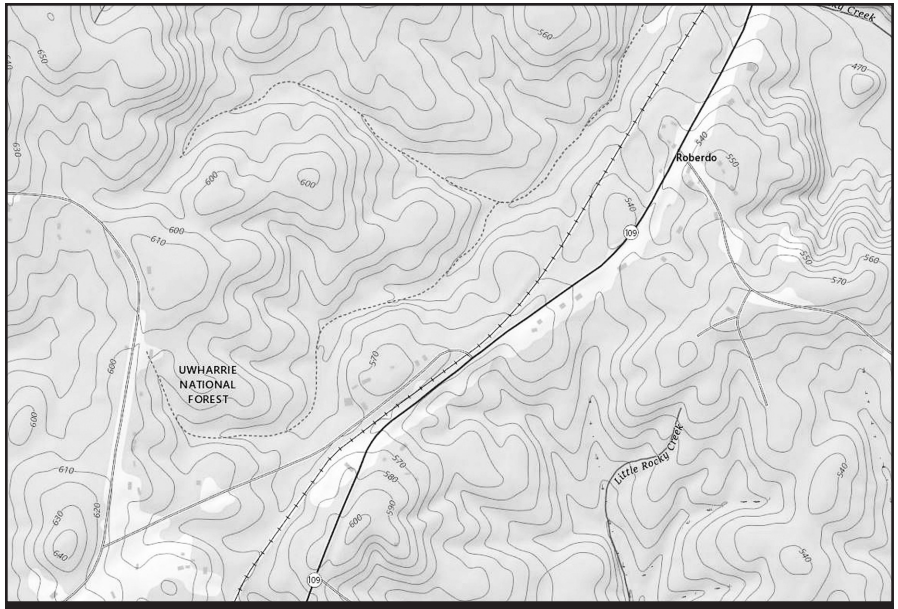
Shortly after the sawmill at Steeds was erected, the Snow Lumber Company built a railroad on two other Montgomery County parcels. The properties were obtained from W. D. Clark and Brothers in 1898 and 1899. It was required that logging there be completed within five years (Deed Book 38, pages 337 and 341). Both properties were located in Mount Gilead Township, near Clarks Grove Church, immediately south of Roberdo. Rocky Creek, on the east side of Troy Road (in the vicinity of Morganton Road) was mentioned in one deed involving 745 acres. The other tract (1,148 acres) was west of Troy Road, and Morganton Road was also mentioned as a bound.

Permission was given to use a tram road or railroad while logging both tracts. The right to harvest timber on a third parcel in the same vicinity was obtained from D. B. Batten in 1899 (Deed Book 38, page 537). Timber on these properties was to be removed within five years. Features compatible with railroad grades can be seen in the LiDAR image of this area visible in Figure 12. A topographical map of the same area is presented in Figure 13. These images and deeds are consistent with timber being transported from this area over the Aberdeen & Asheboro Railroad. Logs may have been routed to Steeds for milling.

While logging near Roberdo was progressing, the Snow Lumber Company acquired new sources of timber to harvest after the Roberdo operation was completed. In December 1901, and December 1902, the company purchased timber rights in the region of Disons Creek (Deed Book 40, pages 552 and 555). The 1902 purchase was bounded in part by Little River, the Cedar Branch of



12-Modern LiDAR Image South of Roberdo



13-Topographical Image of the Area Seen in Figure 12

Disons Creek, and Troy Road. These deeds stipulated that timber had to be removed within two years. To complete logging on those tracts within the required time, the company eventually built another logging railroad to the east of Mount Gilead. It followed the course of modern-day Highway 731 and may have been functional as early as 1903.

During April 1905, a Mount Gilead Township timber tract was obtained from J. T. Stanback (Deed Book 45, page 546. It was described as "All on Thompson place lying north of (Richmond) County line and East of Hamer Creek and all on Mountain tract-West of Wallis Gaddy's house line . . ." Two years were allowed for removing that timber. This tract must have been accessed via a tram railroad along Highway 73. That tram was shared with another business, the Taft Lumber Company. The Snow Lumber Company obtained an additional tract near this tram from William M. Taft in February 1906 (Deed 45, page 524).

The Snow Lumber Company built another system of trams in the area north and northwest of Mount Gilead. B. F. Bruton sold timber rights to the company in August 1905 (Deed Book 45, page 548). The parcel was located on Clarks Creek, adjoining the property of Frank DeBerry. Another timber deed was signed in February 1906. This land bordered the east bank of the Pee Dee River, in Pee Dee Township and was obtained from George M. Bruton (Deed Book 45, page 549). That deed permitted construction of tramways and railroads. Another bound was mentioned in a March 1906 timber deed (Deed Book 47, page 132) from W. T. Hearne. That document narrates : "Beginning near the tram . . ." This tram was in the vicinity of modern-day Hearne Farm Road. Its main line was shared with the Taft lumber Company, which had a mill of its own at Mount Gilead.

Precisely when the Snow Lumber Company began milling timber at Mount Gilead has not been determined. But significantly, in October 1904, a two-acre property was acquired there from Charles B. Ingram. It was located on the west side of the Aberdeen & Asheboro Railroad (Deed Book 43, page 244). An adjacent property was purchased in July 1905 (Book 43, page 420).

In 1906, J. C. McKenzie took delivery of a used 36-inch gauge Shay locomotive (Shop #810) at Mount Gilead. In his own name, McKenzie never purchased any timberland or timber rights in Montgomery County. His engine almost certainly operated on the Snow railroad. *Railroading in the Carolina Sandhills: Volume 2*, page 66, reports that Norfolk Southern Railroad right-of-way maps show a railroad track along Troy Road which is labelled with McKenzie's name. That track approaches the Snow Lumber Company mill in Mount Gilead. In 1910, the same locomotive (Shop #810) was operated by McKenzie in Richmond County. There, it was utilized on another Snow Lumber Company railroad that originated at Norman.

The American Lumberman's *Register of Sawmill and Planing Mill Auxiliary Equipment For 1907* reports that at Mount Gilead, the Snow Lumber Company of High Point, in Guilford County, had a 36-inch gauge logging railroad laid with 35-pound rails, upon which operated one locomotive. Six miles were used, and ten additional miles were under construction, with six more miles contemplated. The entry also mentioned: "Planing mill only, at Mt. Gilead."

In February 1910, the Snow Lumber Company signed an agreement with Dr. T. C. McSwain (Deed Book 51, page 276, and pages 291-299) of Bingham, South Carolina. The company acquired timber rights on 35 tracts

comprising approximately 8,000 acres of land situated in Montgomery and Richmond Counties. Some of the bounds mentioned in those documents are Cheeks Creek and its Townsend Branch, Thickety Creek, Dry Creek, and Big Mountain Creek near Tabernacle Church Road. The Snow Lumber Company grades presented on the page preceding page 1 were located through review of deeds meeting three criteria: the Snow Lumber Company was the grantee; tram roads were authorized; and references to currently identifiable physical features such as creeks and rivers were included.

By the beginning of 1914, the Snow Lumber Company had finished its Mount Gilead operation. In a deed signed on January 1 (Deed Book 58, pages 390-412) the National Lumber Company of Concord, in Cabarrus County, North Carolina, acquired a lengthy list of timber rights in Montgomery and Richmond Counties. Most of the Montgomery County properties were in Mount Gilead Township. Included in the sale were four parcels in the town of Mount Gilead which comprised the mill site (three of these parcels were located on both sides of the Aberdeen & Asheboro Railroad). The sale price was $10 and "other valuable considerations."

This deed provides insight into the business practice of the Snow Lumber Company operation at Mount Gilead. Near the end of the document (page 410) is stated: "Also all lumber which has been sawed for the grantor and paid for by the grantor to be hauled to Mt. Gilead, this lumber being at the following locations: at the Safert Mill on the M. E. McKenzie land; the Galloway Mill on the W. S. Ingram land; the Dunn Mill on the W. S. Ingram land; the Morton Mill on the C. J. Ingram land; the Morton Mill on the W. R. Christian land; and the Lilly Mill on the Lilly land, the preceding mills all being located in Montgomery County.

"At the Cagle Mill on the Mrs. J. T. Legrand land; the Haywood Mill on the Mrs. J. T. Jones land; the two Henley Mills on the W. B. Brookshire land; the two S. Dennis Mills on the Brookshire land; and the D. Dennis Mill on the Brookshire land. The seven preceding mills being located in Richmond County. Also, any and all other lumber sawed for and paid for by the Snow Lumber Company to be hauled to Mt. Gilead."

The National Lumber Company had already acquired timber rights on two Richmond County properties from J. P. Little in 1911 and 1913. Both were in the region near Little's Mill, in Steeles Township. The National Lumber Company continued to operate in Montgomery County after 1914, buying timber rights on Cheeks Creek, in Cheeks Creek Township, from L. R. Lisk in 1916 (Deed Book 62, page 214). There were no deeds to or from the National Lumber Company after 1916, suggesting that it merely cleaned up small pockets of residual timber after the Snow Lumber Company departed from Mount Gilead. As such, it may have been the last organization to use the tram railroads built by the Snow Lumber Company.

The 1915 edition of *The North Carolina Year Book and Business Directory* has entries at Mount Gilead for the Snow Lumber Company and the Taft Lumber Company, with both appearing as lumber manufacturers. In the 1916 edition, only the Taft Lumber Company was listed at Mount Gilead. Nonetheless, the Snow Lumber Company continued to obtain timber from Montgomery County. Primarily in 1922, it purchased extensive timber rights in Cheeks Creek, Rocky Springs, and Biscoe Townships. Generally, those deeds did not include the right to construct tram roads.

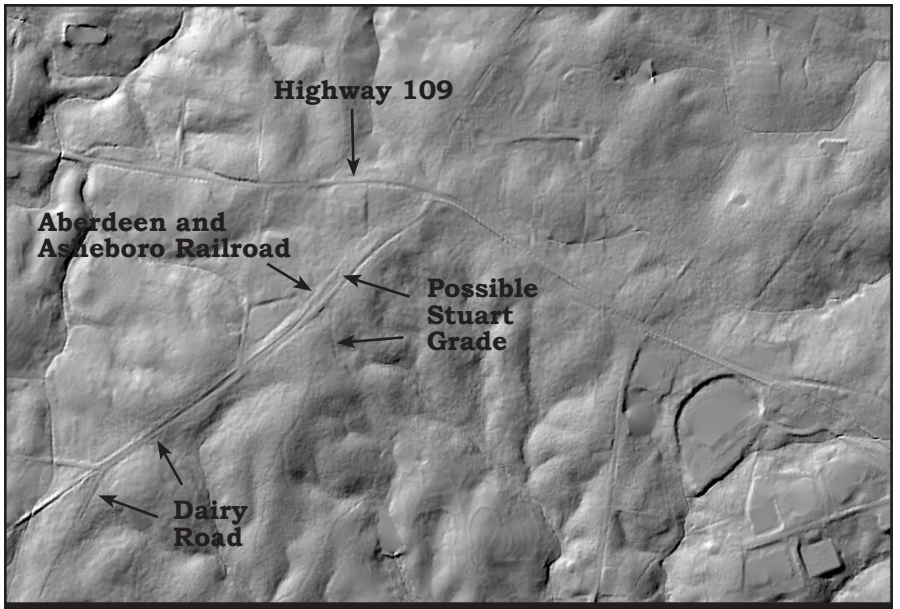
Interestingly, American Lumberman's *Register of Sawmill Equipment For 1915* no longer includes information about

any company's sawmill or logging railroad at Mount Gilead. In that year's edition, the only listing for the Snow Lumber Company was at Norman. There, the company had a machine shop and electric light plant. Although the Snow Lumber Company previously had operated a Richmond County logging railroad which terminated there, no logging railroad appeared in the 1915 listing.

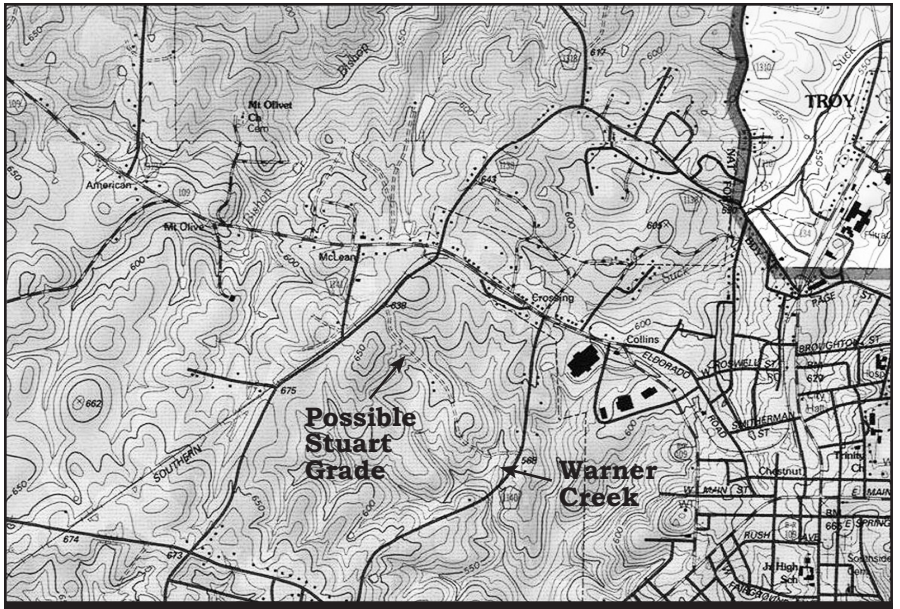
Ira A. Stuart lived in the town of Troy when the 1900 Federal census was taken. His occupation was that of sawmill superintendent. In 1902, he acquired a Shay locomotive (Shop #507) which, later that year, became the property of another operator in Columbus County, North Carolina. Precisely where Stuart used this locomotive, for such a brief time, has not been confirmed. Perhaps it was used on timberland about one mile west of Troy. An unknown grade is visible in Figure 14, which is a modern LiDAR ground image of the region around Dairy Road. A clear connection to the Aberdeen & Asheboro Railroad is visible. Figure 15 is a topographical image of the corresponding region.

As early as 1905, another enterprise, the **Taft Lumber Company**, operated its own tram railway (**Mount Gilead & Mangum Tram Railroad**) south of Mt. Gilead (Deed Book 47, page 82). It seems that eventually, the Taft Lumber Company developed a close working relationship with the Snow Lumber Company. As a result, both company's log trains were allowed to operate over the same tram lines located north, east, and southeast of Mount Gilead.

William M. and Floyd B. Taft were sons of Charles W. Taft. In the 1880s, Charles practiced law in Sutton, Vermont. After migrating to North Carolina, all three Tafts became



14-Modern LiDAR Image of the Area West of Troy



15-Topographical Map of the Area West of Troy

lumbermen who resided at Mount Gilead when the 1900 Federal census was taken. Eventually, the Tafts had their own Mount Gilead lumber mill. In addition to the Mount Gilead & Mangum Tram Railroad, the tram lines shared with the Snow Lumber Company were located north of Mount Gilead and along Highways 73 and 731.

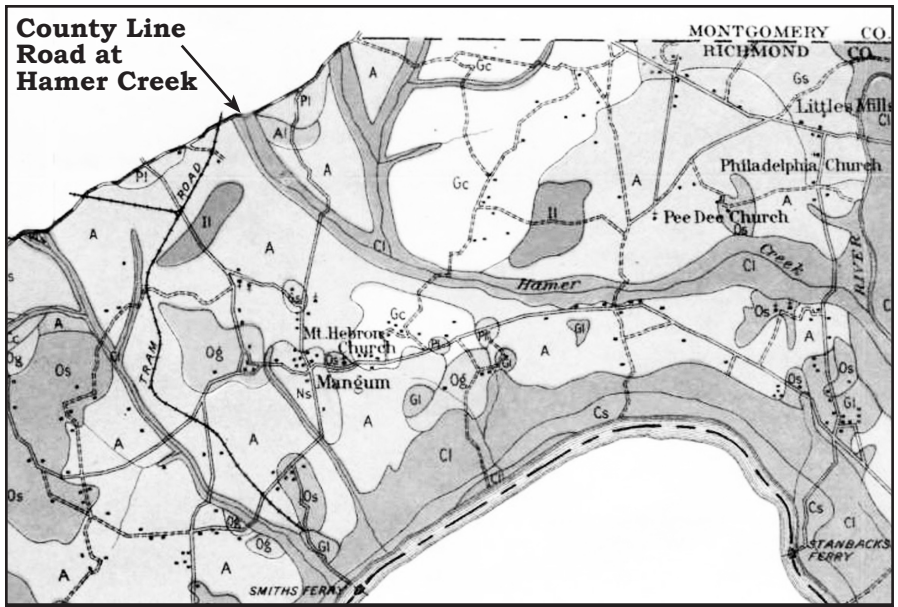
Railroading in the Carolina Sandhills: Volume 2, page 105, identifies the Taft tram railroad which headed south from Mount Gilead as the "Mount Gilead-Mangum Tramway." In May 1905, E. H. Taft (the wife of Charles) purchased 40 acres of land (Montgomery County Deed Book 42, page 472) "Beginning at the ford on Hamer Creek where the county line road (between Montgomery and Richmond Counties) crosses and runs thence with the county line road . . ."

Additional timber rights between the county line and Mount Gilead were acquired in December 1905 when Floyd B. Taft purchased timber rights (Deed Book 47, page 82) somewhat north of those purchased the previous May. Adjacent landowners were Addison Ingold, E. T. Haywood, Henry Bolton, and property owned by a person identified as "Gadd." The document mentions "Corner being near the tram road belonging to F. B. Taft at a branch [stream] between Ingold and E. T. Haywood lands, . . ."

Part of this tram railroad appears on the 1910 map *Rural Delivery Routes Richmond County, N. C.*, some of which is reproduced in Figure 16. Interestingly, the same area is visible in the corresponding map from Montgomery County (also published in 1910) but the tram is not included on that map.

By means of a 1907 contract recorded on page 8 of Deed Book 48, William M. Taft sold certain logging equipment to H. C. Morris. That personal property was already being used by Morris on land belonging to Charlie Mask. In the 1910 Federal census, Mask resided on Deberry Mill Road (the historical DeBerry Mill had been located on Clark's Creek). These data suggest that the Snow Lumber Company tram railroad, north of Mount Gilead, was also being used to transport Taft timber. Another right-of-way used by the Tafts (and shared with the Snow Lumber Company) stretched into Richmond County, through Exway and then farther east along the county line. It approached the eastern edge of Steeles Township.

Two 36-inch gauge Shay locomotives were used by the Taft Lumber Company. About 1910, an engine carrying Shop #409 arrived at Mount Gilead. It was acquired from the Snow Lumber Company. By 1920, it was being operated by Floyd B. Taft at Wadesboro, in Anson County. The second Shay, carrying Shop #593, was named *W. M. Taft*. It was delivered to Floyd B. Taft at Wadesboro about



16-Mt. Gilead-Mangum Tram in Richmond County

1906 and was transferred to Mount Gilead about 1915. Sometime after 1915, the Taft tram railroad at Mount Gilead ceased operating.

Oliver Monroe Wade was a son of Columbus C. Wade of Troy, North Carolina. The elder Wade was at times a probate court judge and county commissioner. Operating as C. C. Wade & Son, the two men did some lumbering in Moore County, with their headquarters at Aberdeen. There. a 100-acre tract bordered by Joes Creek and the north side of Old Yadkin Road was purchased in 1896 (Moore County Deed Book 16, page 169). That is likely where they operated a 36-inch gauge Shay locomotive (Shop #441) during the time it took to harvest that property.

By 1897, the same Shay locomotive was in use by the Wade Tram & Lumber Company in Montgomery County at Steeds. Oliver M. Wade bought a five-acre parcel there in 1897. The exact location of the Wade tram road has not been ascertained. It may be represented by one of the paths visible in the map on the page preceding page 1. However, it might also have followed what is now Steed Road, leading southeast from the community of Steeds.

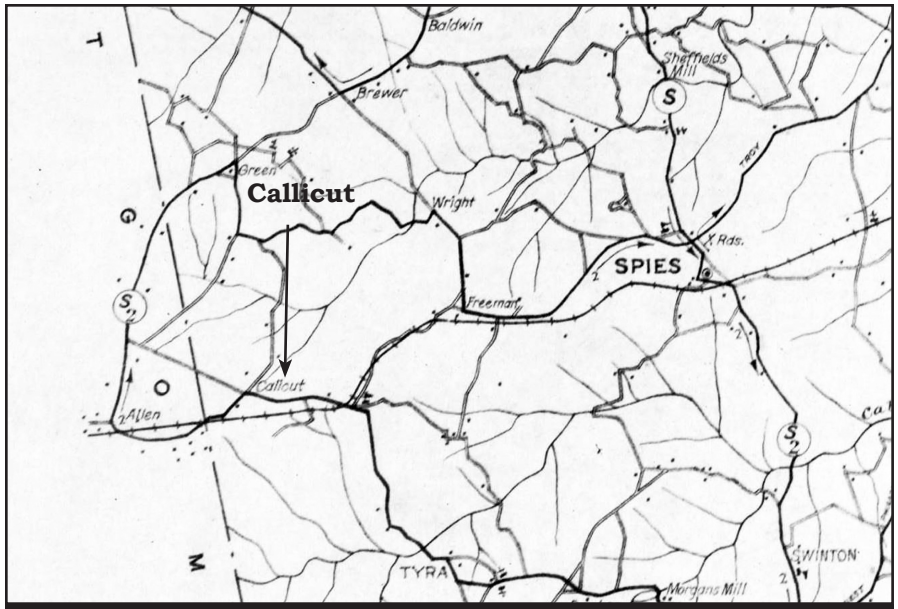
Evidently, the Wade lumbering operation at Steeds was completed by 1900, for Oliver M. Wade "doing business as C. C. Wade & Son" sold all assets there to Frederick W. Wilkins of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This included the five-acres purchased in 1897, the planing mill located on that property, a dry kiln, other mill buildings, eleven tenement houses, and other equipment.

After 1900, Oliver M. Wade remained active in the Montgomery County timber industry. Various tracts were purchased in 1901 and 1902 (Deed Book 42, pages 108 and 161). These were in the southern part of the county along the Little River, and in the fork between the Yadkin and Uwharrie Rivers. Another 1901 deed (Book 40, page 227) mentions that Wade was allowed to construct tram roads on several tracts of timberland. These properties were also in the south part of the county, in the vicinity of Thickety Creek and Big Creek. It could not be determined whether tram railroads were constructed on those parcels.

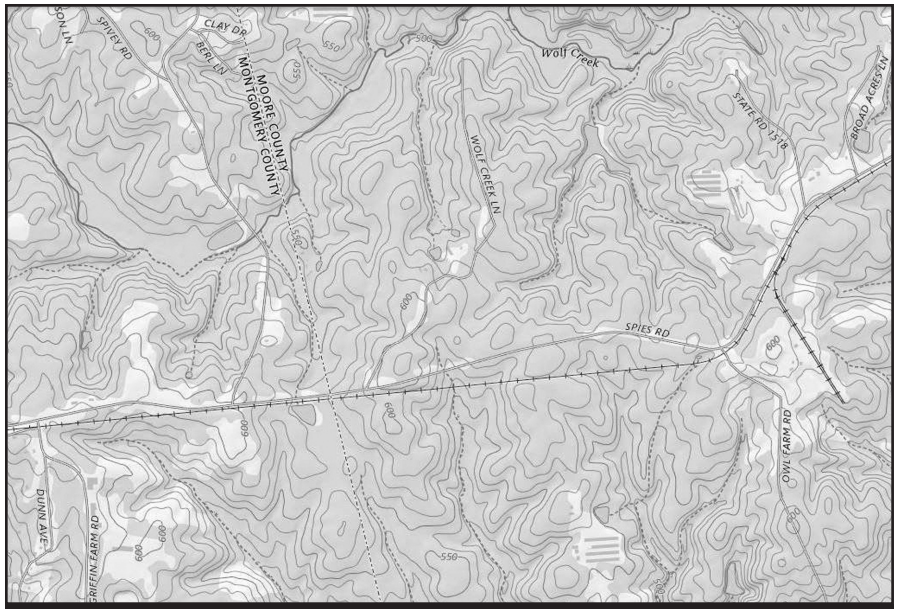
Oliver M. Wade eventually moved to Quitman, in Brooks County Georgia. There, he managed a shingle mill when the 1910 Federal Census was taken.

William H. Watkins resided in Randolph County when the 1920 Federal census was taken. There, he was a salesman in the lumber business. Sometime after 1928 he acquired a used, standard gauge Shay locomotive (Shop #643) while conducting business at Troy. The 1930 census identified him as a farmer, living in the town of Troy. The nature of his business, and where the engine was used, has not been determined.

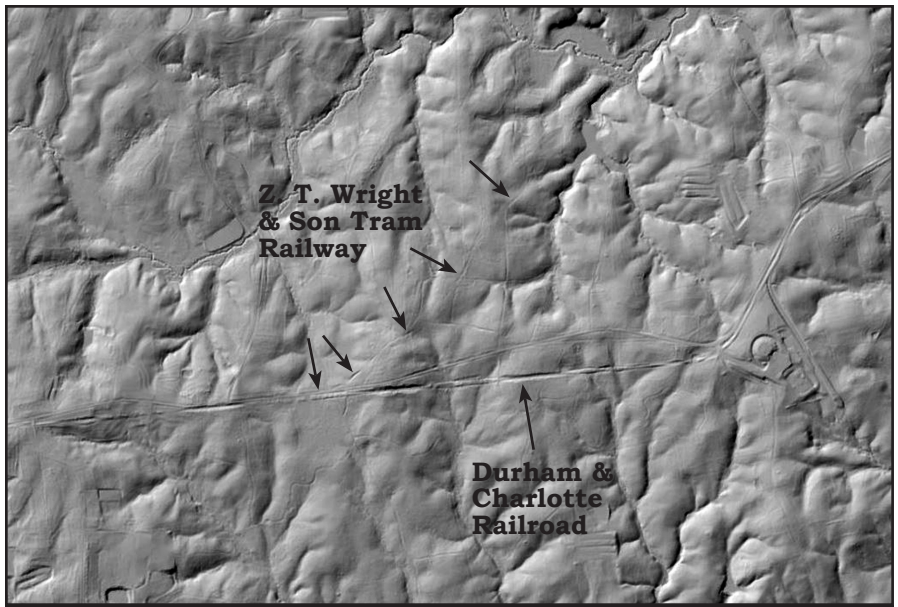
Z. T. Wright & Son started a lumber business at Star about 1896, shortly after the Aberdeen & West End Railroad reached there in 1895. To supply the company's mill, a tram railway was built eastward from Star. For use on the tram, Zacheus T. Wright purchased a used, standard gauge Shay locomotive (Shop #344) in December 1896. The length of this line was about 3.5 miles, reaching about one mile into Moore County and terminating at "Callicut's Place" (named for Archibald Callicutt, who resided in Sheffield Township). Figure 17 is part of the 1910-era map *Rural Delivery Routes, Moore*



17-Circa 1910 Location of "Calicut" in Moore County



19-Topographical Map East of Star, North Carolina



18-Modern LiDAR Image East of Star, North Carolina

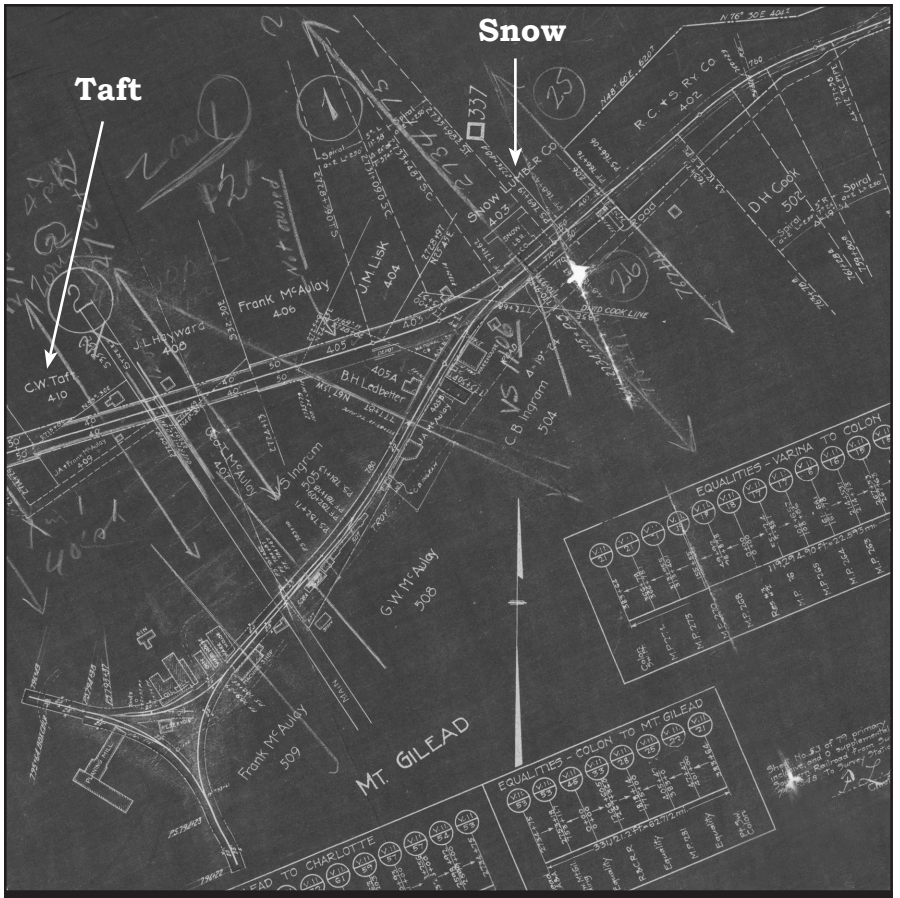
County, N.C. "Calicut" is identified near the Montgomery County line. A LiDAR ground image of this same area is presented in Figure 18. The route of the tram railway is visible. Figure 19 is a modern topographical map displaying that region.

The website *Carolina* describes a conflict between Wright's business and the Durham & Charlotte Railroad. That series of events occurred while the Durham & Charlotte was attempting to construct its new rail line into Star, approaching from the east. "As the Durham & Charlotte Railroad construction crews approached Star, they came upon the tramway, which they claimed was in their right-of-way.

"The Durham & Charlotte Railroad took Z.T. Wright to court. Mr. Wright claimed that he was there first and had the proper right-of-way. Wright also stated in his

testimony that he operated a steam locomotive on the line. He actually owned two Shay engines (#344 and #541) but #541 was not bought until after he mortgaged the tramway in 1897 to Albert [sic] H. Saunders, a fellow lumberman from Candor. After several years of litigation, Z.T. Wright and John Lenning finally came to a compromise. Mr. Lenning agreed to install a siding on his railroad for Wright at the Callicutt Place if Z.T. Wright removed his tramway (note that "Callicut" appears on the 1910 map *Rural Delivery Routes Moore County, N. C.*). Mr. Lenning also had to pay Mr. Wright for the right-of-way and court costs. The tramway was removed in 1902 and the Durham & Charlotte Railroad was then completed to Star."

Because both of Wright's Shay locomotives were owned by operators in counties far from Montgomery in 1899, it is unclear just when the tram became inactive. Perhaps it was maintained until 1902 while litigation with the Durham & Charlotte Railroad continued. Z. T. Wright & Son still appeared in the 1903 edition of *The North Carolina Year Book and Business Directory* as a lumber manufacturer at Star.



12-1914 Norfolk Southern RR Track Plan at Mt. Gilead

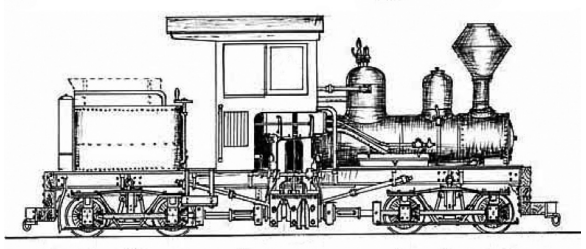



Figure 20 reproduces part of the 1914 Norfolk Southern Railroad Valuation map of Valuation Section 11, Sheet 51. Specifically, the track plan at Mt. Gilead is displayed. Properties originally owned by C. W. Taft and the Snow Lumber Company are identified with arrows.